

Tory on right track

The Tories let Beeching loose and have generally championed road building and the road lobby.

But it is often Labour local councils which are the toughest opponents of sensible rail schemes and the Labour Government's attitude is at best ambivalent.

In Bedford both Labour and the Liberal Democrats have held up the East West rail scheme and in Luton, it is Labour which is stopping the Luton-Dunstable line being reopened.

But the Tory MP for South West Bedfordshire Andrew Selous, while still arguing for bypasses round Dunstable, supports the rail reopening as well as an extension to Leighton Buzzard.

He also suspects unacceptable connivance between local and national Labour.

He told the House of Commons: "The Government has told us that, unless we co-operate with its Translink proposals for a guided busway from Luton to Dunstable, our chances of a bypass will similarly diminish."

There were cries of "hear hear" when he added: "That is an unacceptable way to treat people in my constituency." He continued:



Positive: Andrew Selous

"I strongly object to the establishment of a guided busway on the site of the existing railway line from Luton to Dunstable.

"Anyone who drives on the roads in the south-east of England will know that they are becoming more congested daily.

"Surely many of the branch lines that Dr Beeching axed should now be brought back into use.

"I hope that the Government will not only open the branch line from Luton to Dunstable, but, in time, will connect that line with

Leighton Buzzard, to where it used to run.

"It is true that part of the track that runs from Dunstable to Leighton Buzzard no longer exists, but it would not be difficult to route a track alongside the Leighton Buzzard southern bypass, which could join the main line to London near Cheddington."

Luton Council has promoted the busway while denying the rail arguments but when Dunstable had a poll with both sides of the argument presented, 68% of people chose the rail option, despite a massive press advertising campaign by Luton Council.

One reason no train operator has shown interest in running trains on the line is that the local politicians have been so negative about rail.

But in 1995 Chiltern Railways said it could run a viable service for around £5million.

Even the busway supporters are beginning to wonder whether they have been sold a pup. They have been told the scheme will increase public transport use by only 0.6%. A reopened rail line would fare far better and could be operating more quickly.

Meeting with Regulator

A Railfuture delegation met Rail Regulator Tom Winsor in London in June.

Mr Winsor explained his role in setting Railtrack's access charges and in the key issues of the regulation of Railtrack's day-to-day management and investment.

The Railfuture delegation, which included president Michael Caton, chairman Peter Lawrence and passenger committee member Peter Davies, stressed the need for investment to keep ahead of demand for rail services.

Mr Winsor explained that, as an essential step, he had asked Railtrack again to complete its register of assets.

We also raised the problem that has arisen along the rail corridor from Walsall to Stourbridge where it is proposed the local metro would take up some track and capacity.

We pointed out that this could jeopardise the future of this route for heavy rail services and prevent it playing a full part in the national rail network.

Peter Lawrence gave a brief report of the meeting when Railfuture's national executive met in Birmingham on 14 July.

Rowland Dale and Ian Macdonald have been co-opted on to the executive which deputed Mike Crowhurst to attend railtrack's annual general meeting in York.

The financial difficulties facing the society were dealt with at length with several members urging that we redouble our efforts to get sponsorship from rail companies including the rolling stock companies.

Members are to be asked to suggest possible sources of funding.

A thorough reappraisal of the society's approach is already under way and it is possible that outside consultants will be brought in to help us improve our organisation and techniques.

But there is also an urgent need to boost membership.

Individual members are to be asked to join in a big push for new members later in the year.

New membership leaflets are being produced by marketing director Kate Tudor-Pole.

Alix Stredwick has agreed to continue working on Railfuture campaigns on a part-time basis.

The executive decided to hold

Railfuture's next annual meeting in Cardiff, partly to recognise its new status as the home of the Welsh Assembly.

Lottery winners

June: Brian Hastings, Scunthorpe £64, E Ratcliffe, Bournemouth £40, A J McBeath, Grange-over-Sands £24, P J Morgan, Lingfield £16, S Moir, Stockton-on-Tees £8, W T Jeffery, Reigate £8.

July: A S Cleveley, Birmingham £64, Mrs J Gardiner, Didcot £40, Brian Hastings, Scunthorpe £24, M Peterson, Acton £16, C Martindale, Carlisle £8, H Maughan, Leighton Buzzard £8.

Join the lottery winners. Send a cheque for £12 (made payable to Railfuture) to Edgar Locke, 3 Langton Court, Worthing BN14 7BZ.

Infrarail 2001

The Infrarail 2001 exhibition is to be held at the Wembley exhibition centre, London from 18-20 September. More information:

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New members always welcome

Membership: £17.50 per year.

Pensioners, students and

unemployed £8.50. User

groups, community and parish

councils £17.50 or £25 to

include 10 copies of *Railwatch*

plus other relevant publications.

Other local authorities and

companies £35. *Families* £2

extra per member, after £17.50.

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